

of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

### **Remarks on Eid al-Fitr**

*December 5, 2002*

Thank you very much, sir. It's good to be with you again. And it is my honor to visit the Islamic Center of Washington once again.

For half a century, this beautiful mosque has served as a place of worship for Muslims and has helped to advance understanding between people of different faiths. Millions of our fellow Americans practice the Muslim faith. They lead lives of honesty and justice and compassion.

I am pleased to join you today in the celebration of Eid, the culmination of the holy month of Ramadan. I appreciate so very much Dr. Khouj, and I want to thank the other distinguished imams from the Washington, DC, area. Thank you all for being here. And I enjoyed our visit. I also appreciate the Muslim schoolchildren who are here, telling me stories and reading poems and showing me artwork. Please tell them thanks again for their hospitality.

Islam traces its origins back to God's call on Abraham. And Ramadan commemorates the revelation of God's word in the Holy Koran to the prophet Mohammad, a word that is read and recited with special attention and reverence by Muslims during this season.

Over the past month, Muslims have fasted, taking no food or water during daylight hours, in order to refocus their minds on faith and redirect their hearts to charity. Muslims worldwide have stretched out a hand of mercy to those in need. Charity tables, at which the poor can break their fast, line the streets of cities and towns. And gifts of food and clothing and money are distributed to ensure that all share in God's abundance. Muslims often invite members of other families to their evening iftaar meals, demonstrating a spirit of tolerance.

During Eid al-Fitr, Muslims celebrate the completion of their fast and the blessings of renewed faith that have come with it. Customs vary between countries, from illuminating lanterns in Egypt to lighting firecrackers in Pakistan, to inviting elders to tra-

ditional feasts in Niger. Around the world, families and neighbors and friends gather to share traditional foods and congratulate each other on meeting the test of Ramadan.

The spirit behind this holiday is a reminder that Islam brings hope and comfort to more than a billion people worldwide. Islam affirms God's justice and insists on man's moral responsibility. This holiday is also an occasion to remember that Islam gave birth to a rich civilization of learning that has benefited mankind.

Here in the United States, our Muslim citizens are making many contributions in business, science and law, medicine and education, and in other fields. Muslim members of our Armed Forces and of my administration are serving their fellow Americans with distinction, upholding our Nation's ideals of liberty and justice in a world at peace. And in our Nation's Capital, this center contributes greatly to our spiritual and cultural life.

On behalf of Laura and our family and the American people, I bring our best wishes to all who worship here and to Muslims throughout the world for a joyous Eid and for health and happiness and prosperity in the year to come.

*Eid Mubarak. God bless.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the mosque at the Islamic Center of Washington, DC. In his remarks, he referred to Abdullah Khouj, director of the center. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

### **Message on the Observance of Eid al-Fitr, 2002**

*December 5, 2002*

I send greetings to Muslims in the United States and around the world as you celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the Festival of Breaking the Fast.

At the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, worship, and reflection, Eid celebrates the renewal of faith, hope, and compassion. During this time of great rejoicing, Muslims give thanks for the blessings they have been granted, and demonstrate their commitment to the Qur'an's teachings by helping those in need. These acts of kindness and generosity strengthen communities

worldwide, and as we observe this holiday season, I encourage Americans of all faiths to join in building a culture of service that demonstrates the true character of our Nation.

America treasures the relationship we have with our many Muslim friends, and we respect the vibrant faith of Islam which inspires countless individuals to lead lives of honesty, integrity, and morality. This year, may Eid also be a time in which we recognize the values of progress, pluralism, and acceptance that bind us together as a Nation and a global community. By working together to advance mutual understanding, we point the way to a brighter future for all.

Laura joins me in sending our best wishes for a joyous Eid, and for health, happiness, and prosperity in the coming year.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

### **Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree**

*December 5, 2002*

Thank you very much. With the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, we observe one of the great traditions of our Nation's Capital. And throughout the Christmas season, we recall that God's love is found in humble places, and God's peace is offered to all of us. Laura and I are pleased to be with you at this Christmas Pageant of Peace, and we thank you all for coming as well.

I want to thank Barbara for hosting this event. I want to thank all the entertainers for making the night such a special evening. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank Peter and the board of directors and the production team for organizing this fine event. I appreciate Santa coming. *[Laughter]* Looks like he needs a belt for Christmas. *[Laughter]* Finally, I want to thank all the good people of the National Park Service. The National Christmas Tree is a living tree, and the Park Service looks after it every single day of the year.

For nearly 80 years, in times of calm and in times of challenge, Americans have gathered for this ceremony. The simple story we remember during this season speaks to every generation. It is the story of a quiet birth in a little town on the margins of an indifferent empire, yet that single event set the direction of history and still changes millions of lives. For over two millennia, Christmas has carried the message that God is with us, and because He's with us, we can always live in hope.

In this season, we celebrate with our families—and deeply miss family members no longer with us. Thousands of families in our Nation are still grieving over the terrible losses that came to them last year on September the 11th. We pray for their comfort. We pray for the comfort for everyone who has lost a life this year.

Our entire Nation is also thinking at this time of year of the men and women in the military, many of whom will spend this Christmas at posts far from home. They stand between Americans and grave danger. They serve in the cause of peace and freedom. They wear the uniform proudly, and we are proud of them.

Laura and I wish every American family the blessings of this season, happy holidays, and a merry Christmas. And now we have the honor of lighting the National Christmas Tree. And joining us we've got two new friends, Samara Banks and Ben Schneller, to help us light this tree.

Now, if everybody—you all step up here. *[Laughter]* Get ready. Please join us in the countdown: Five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:57 p.m. on the Ellipse during the annual Christmas Pageant of Peace. In his remarks, he referred to actress Barbara Eden, hostess, and Peter F. Nostrand, chairman, Christmas Pageant of Peace; entertainer Roy Clark, who played Santa Claus; and Samara Banks and Ben Schneller, children who assisted the President in lighting the National Christmas Tree. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.